

LOVE OR MONEY;

OR,
A PERILOUS SECRET.

BY CHARLES READE,
Author of "Put Yourself in His Place,"
etc., etc., etc.

CHAPTER IX.
LOVERS PARTED.

Walter, little dreaming the blow his own love had received, made Percy write to Julia an apology, and an invitation to visit his new house if he was forgiven. Julia said she could not forgive him, and would not go. Walter said, "Put on your bonnet, and take a little drive with me."

"Oh, with pleasure," said Julia, slyly. So then Walter drove her to the new house, without a word of remembrance on her part, and Fitzroy met her radiant, and Walter slipped away round a corner and when he came back the quarrel had dissolved. He had brought a hamper with all the necessities of life. Tablecloth, napkins, knives, forks, spoons, cold pie, salad, and champagne. They lunched beside the brook on the lawn. The lovers drank health, and Julia appointed him solemnly to the post of "peacemaker," for, said she, "you have shown great talent that way, and I foresee we shall want one, for we shall be always quarrelling; shan't we, Percy?"

"N-o; n-never again."

"Then you mustn't be jealous."

"I'm not. I-despise jealousy. I'm above it."

"Oh, indeed," said Julia, slyly.

"Come, don't begin again, you two," said Walter, "or no champagne."

"Now what a horrid threat!" said Julia. "I'll be good, for one."

In short they had a merry time, and Walter drove Julia home. Both were in high spirits.

In the hall Walter found a short note from Mary Bartley.

"DEAR, DEAR WALTER—I write with a bleeding heart to tell you that papa has only just discovered our attachment, and I am grieved to say he disapproves of it, and has forbidden me to encourage your love, that is dearer to me than all the world, for it is very hard. It seems so cruel. But I must obey. Do not make obedience too difficult, dear Walter. And pray, pray do not be as unhappy as I am. He says he has reasons, but he has not told me what they are, except that your father has other views for you; but, indeed, with both parents against us what can we do? Forgive me the pain this will give you. Ask yourself whether it gives me any less. You were all the world to me. Now everything is dull and distasteful. What a change in one little day! We are very unfortunate. But it cannot be forever. And if you will be constant to me, you know I shall love you. I could not change. Ah, Walter, I little thought, when I said I would temporize, how soon I should be called on to do it. I can't write any more for crying. I do nothing but cry ever since papa was so cruel; but I must obey."

"Your loving, sorrowful,"

"MARY."

This letter was a chilling blow to poor Walter. He took it into his own room and read it again and again. It brought the tears into his own eyes, and discouraged him deeply for a time. But, of course, he was not so disposed to succumb to authority as the weaker vessel was. He wrote back:

"My own Love—Don't grieve for me. I don't care for anything so long as you love me. I shall resist, of course. As for my father, I am going to marry Julia to Percy Fitzroy, and so end my governess's nonsense. As for your father, I do not despair of softening him. It is only a check; it is not a defeat. Who on earth can part us if we are true to each other. God bless you, dearest! I did not think you loved me so much. Your letter gives me comfort forever, and only disappointments for a time. Don't fret, sweet love. It will all be right in the end."

"Your grateful, hopeful love, till death,"

"WALTER."

Mary opened this letter with a beating heart. She read it with tears and smiles and utter amazement. She knew so little about the male character that this way of receiving a knock-down blow astonished and charmed her. She thought to herself, no wonder women looked up to men. They will have their own way; they resist, of course. How sensible; we give in, right or wrong. What a comfort I have got a man to back me, and not a poor sorrowing, despairing, obeying thing like myself!

So she was comforted for the minute, and settled in her own mind that she would be good and obedient, and Walter should do all the fighting. But letters soon cease to satisfy the yearning hearts of lovers unnaturally separated. Walter and Mary lived so near each other, yet now they never met. Bartley took care of that. He told Mary she must not walk out without a maid, or ride without a servant, and he gave them both special orders. He even obliged her with his own company, though that rather bored him.

Under this severe restraint Mary's health and spirits suffered, and she lost some of her beautiful color.

Walter's spirits were kept up only by anger. Julia Clifford saw he was in trouble, and asked him what was the matter.

"Oh, nothing that would interest you," said he, rather sullenly.

"Excuse me," said she. "I am always interested in the troubles of my friends, and you have been a good friend to me."

"It is very good of you to think so. Well, then, yes, I am unhappy. I am crossed in love."

"Is it that fair girl you introduced me to when out riding?"

"Yes."

"She is lovely."

"Miss Clifford, she is an angel."

"Hah! We are all angels till we are found out. Who is the man?"

"That she prefers to the good Walter. She deserves a good whipping, your angel."

"Much obliged to you, Miss Clifford; but she prefers no man to your good Walter, though I am not worthy to tie her shoes. Why, we are devoted to each other."

"Well, you needn't fly out at me. I am your friend, as you will see. Make me your confidante. Explain, please. How can you be crossed in love if there's no other man?"

"It's her father. He has discovered our love, and forbids her to speak to me."

"Her father!" said Julia, contemptuously. "Is that all? That for her father! You shall have her in spite of fifty fathers. If it had been a lover, now."

"I should have talked to him, not to you," said Walter, with his eyes flashing.

"Be quiet, Walter; as it is not a lover, nor even a mother, you shall have the girl; and a very sweet girl she is. Will you accept me for your ally? Women are wiser than men in these things, and understand one another."

"Oh, Miss Clifford," said Walter, "this is good of you! Of course it will be a great blessing to us both to have your sympathy and assistance."

"Well, then," said Julia, "begin by telling me—have you spoken to her father?"

"No."

"Then that is the very first thing to be done. Come, order our horses. We will ride over directly. I will call on Miss Bartley, and you on Miss. Now mind, you must ignore all that has passed, and just ask permission to court his daughter. Whilst you are closeted with him, the young lady and I will learn each other's mind with a verity you poor slow things have no idea of."

"I see one thing," said Walter, "that I am a child in such matters compared with you. What decision! what promptitude!"

"Then imitate it, young man. Order the horses directly," and she stamped her foot impatiently.

Walter turned to the stables without another word, and Julia flew up-stairs to put on her riding habit.

Bartley was in his study with a map of the farm before him, and two respectable but rather rough men in close conference over it. These were practical men from the county of Durham, whom he had ferreted out by means of an agent, men who knew a great deal about coal, and confirmed Hope's opinion that coal lay below the surface of certain barren fields, and the question now was as to the exact spot where it would be advisable to sink the first shaft.

Bartley was heart and soul in this, and elevated by love of gain far above such puny considerations as the happiness of Mary Bartley and her lover. She, poor girl, sat forlorn in her little drawing-room, and tried to draw a bit, and tried to read a bit, and tried to reconcile a new German symphony to her ears as well as to her judgment, which told her it was too learned not to be harmonious, though it sounded very discordant. But all these efforts ended in a sigh of despondency, and in brooding on innocent delights forbidden, and a prospect which, to her youth and inexperience, seemed a wilderness robbed of the sun.

Whilst she sat thus pensive and sad there came a sudden rush and clatter of hoofs, and Miss Clifford and Walter Clifford reined up their horses under the very window.

Mary started up delighted at the bare sight of Walter, but amazed and puzzled. The next moment her quick intelligence told her this was some daring manoeuvre or other, and her heart beat high.

Walter opened the door and stood beside it, affecting a cold ceremony.

"Miss Bartley, I have brought Miss Clifford to call on you at her request. My visit is to your father. Where shall I find him?"

"In his study," murmured Miss Bartley.

Walter returned, and the two ladies looked at each other steadily for one moment, and took stock of one another's dress, looks, character, and souls with supernatural rapidity. Then Mary smiled, and motioned her visitor to a seat, and waited.

Miss Clifford made her approaches obliquely at first.

"I ought to apologize to you for not returning your call before this. At any rate, here I am at last."

"You are most welcome, Miss Clifford," said Mary, warmly.

"Now the ice is broken, I want you to call me Julia."

"You may, and you must, if I call you Mary. Why, you know we are cousins; at least I suppose so. We are both cousins of Walter Clifford, so we must be cousins to each other, Mary."

And she fixed her eyes on her hostess in a very peculiar way.

Mary returned this fixed look with such keen intelligence that her grav eyes actually glittered.

"Mary, I seldom waste much time before I come to the point. Walter Clifford is a good fellow; he has behaved well to me. I had a quarrel with mine, and Walter played the peacemaker, and brought us together again without wounding my pride. By-and-by I found out Walter himself was in grief about you. It was my turn, wasn't it? I made him tell me all. He wasn't very willing, but I would know. I saw his love was making him miserable, and so I yours, dear."

"So I took it on me to advise him. I have made him call on your father. Fathers sometimes pooh-pooh their daughters' affections; but when the son of Colonel Clifford comes with a formal proposal of marriage, Mr. Bartley cannot pooh-pooh him."

Mary clasped her hands, but said nothing.

Julia flowed on:

"And the next thing is to comfort you. You seem to want a good cry, dear."

"Yes, I do."

"Then come here and take it."

No sooner said than done. Mary's head on Julia's shoulder, and Julia's arm round Mary's waist.

"Oh, you better, dear?"

"Oh, so much."

"It is a comfort, isn't it? Well, now, listen to me. Fathers sometimes delay a girl's happiness; but they don't often destroy it; they don't go and break her heart as some mothers do. A mother that is resolved to have her own way brings another man forward; fathers are too simple to see that is the only way. And then a designing mother cajoles the poor girl and deceives her, and does a number of things a man would call villainies. Don't you fret your heart out for so small a thing as a father's opposition. You are sure to tire him out if he loves you, and if he doesn't love you, or loves money better, why, then, he is not a worthy rival to my cousin Walter, for that man really loves you, and would marry you if you had not a penny. So would Percy Fitzroy marry me. And that is why I prefer him to the grenadiers and plunders with silky mustaches, and half an eye on me and an eye and a half on my money."

Many other things passed between these two, but what we have endeavored to repeat was the cream of Julia's discourse, and both her advice and her sympathy were for the time a wonderful comfort to the love-sick, solitary girl.

But our business is with Walter Clifford.

As soon as he was announced, Mr. Bartley dismissed his rugged visitors and received Walter affably, though a little stiffly.

Walter opened his business at once, and told him he had come to ask his permission to court his daughter. He said he had admired her from the first moment, and now his happiness depended on her, and he felt sure he could make her happy; not, of course, by his money, but by his devotion. Then as to making a proper provision for her—here Bartley stopped him.

"My young friend," said he, "there can be no objection either to your person or to your position. But there are difficulties, and at present they are serious ones. Your father has other views."

"But, Mr. Bartley," said Walter, eagerly, "the most abundant them. The lady is engaged."

"Well, then," said Bartley, "it will be time to come to me when he has abandoned those views, and also overcome his prejudices against me and mine. But there is another difficulty. My daughter is not old enough to marry, and I object to long engagements. Everything, therefore, points to delay, and on this I must insist."

Bartley having taken this moderate ground, remained immovable. He promised to encourage no other suitor; but in return he had a right to demand that Walter would not disturb his daughter's peace of mind until the prospect was clearer. In short, instead of being taken by surprise, the result showed Bartley quite prepared for this interview, and he baffled the young man without offending him. He was cautious not to do that, because he was going to mine for coal, and feared remonstrances, and wanted Walter to take his part, or at least be neutral knowing his love for Mary. So they parted, good friends, but when he related the result to Julia Clifford she shook her head, and said the old fox had outwitted him. Soon after, knitting her brows in thought for some time, she said, "She is very young, much younger than she looks. I am afraid you will have to wait a little, and wait."

"But," said Walter, in dismay, "am I not to see her or speak to her all the time I am waiting?"

"I'd see both fathers hanged first, if I was a man," said Julia.

In short, under the courageous advice of Julia Clifford, Walter began to throw himself in Mary's way, and looked disconsolate; that set Mary pining directly, and Julia found her pale, and grieving for Walter, and persuaded her to write him two or three lines of comfort; she did, and that drew pages from him. Unfortunately he did not restrain himself, but flung his whole heart upon paper, and raised a tumult in the innocent heart of her who read his passionate longings.

She was so worked upon that at last one day she confided to Julia that her old nurse was going to visit her sister, Mrs. Gilbert, who lived only ten miles off, and she thought she should ride and see her.

"When?" asked Julia, carelessly.

"Oh, any day next week," said Mary, carelessly. "Wednesday, if it is fine. She will not be there till Monday."

"Does she know?" asked Julia.

"Oh, yes; and left because she could not agree with papa about it; and, dear, she said a strange thing—a very strange thing; she knew papa's reasons against him, and they were her reasons for him."

"Fancy that!" said Julia. "Your father told you what the reasons were?"

"No; he wouldn't. They both treat me like a child."

"You mean they pretend to," she added.

"I see one thing; there is some mystery behind this. I wonder what it is?"

"Ten to one, it is money. I am only twenty, but already I have found out that money governs the world. Let me see—your mother was a Clifford. She must have had money. Did she settle any on you?"

"I am sure I don't know."

"Ten to one she did, and your father is your trustee; and when you marry, he must show his accounts and cash up. There, that is where the shoe pinches."

Mary was distressed.

"Oh, don't say so, dear. I can't bear to think that of papa. You make me very unhappy."

"Forgive me, dear," said Julia. "I am too fond of me and suspicious. Some day I will tell you things in my own life that have soured me. Money—I hate the very word," she said, clinching her teeth.

She urged her view no more, but in her own heart she felt sure that she had read Mr. Bartley aright. Why, he was a trader, into the bargain.

As for Mary, when she came to think over this conversation, her own subtle instinct told her that stronger pressure than ever would now be brought on her. Her timidity, her maiden modesty, and her desire to do right set her on her defence. She determined to have loving but impartial advice, and so she overcame her shyness, and wrote to Mr. Hope. Even then she was in no hurry to enter on such a subject by letter, so she must commence by telling him that her father had set a great many people, most of them strangers, to dig for coal. That cross old thing, Colonel Clifford, had read her letter, and told her of her father, and said unkind and disrespectful things—that the love of money led to loss of money, and that papa might just as well dig a well and throw his money into that. She herself was sorry he had not waited for Mr. Hope's return before undertaking so serious a speculation. Warned by this preliminary, she ventured into the delicate subject, and told him the substance of what we have told the reader, only in a far more timid and suggestive way, and implored him to advise her by return of post if possible—or why not come home? Papa had said only yesterday, "I wish I was here, and I would give an answer by return of post. It disappointed her on the whole. Mr. Hope realized the whole situation, though she had sketched it faintly instead of painting it boldly. He was all sympathy, and he saw at once that he could not himself imagine a better match for her than Walter Clifford. But then he observed Mr. Bartley himself offered no personal objection, but wished the matter to be in abeyance until she was older, and Colonel Clifford's objection to the connection should be removed or softened. That might really be hoped for should Miss Clifford marry Mr. Fitzroy; and really in the mean time he (Hope) could hardly take on him to encourage her in impatience and disobedience. He would prefer to talk to Bartley first. With that he would take a less hot line, and set her happiness above

everything. In short, he wrote cautiously. He inwardly resolved to be on the spot very soon whether Bartley wanted him or not; but he did not tell Mary this, and she said to Julia—"too wise."

Mary was disappointed. "How kind and wise he is!" she said to Julia—"too wise."

Next Wednesday morning Mary Bartley rode to Mrs. Gilbert, and was received by her with courtesy, but with a warm embrace by Mrs. Easton. After a while the latter invited her into the parlor, saying there is somebody there; but no one knows. This, however, though hardly unexpected, set Mary's heart beating, and when the parlor door was opened, Miss Easton stepped back, and Mary was alone with Walter Clifford.

Then might those who oppose an honest and tender affection have learned a lesson. It was no longer affection only. It was passion. Walter was pale, agitated, eager; he kissed her hands impatiently, and drew her to his bosom. She sobbed there; he poured inarticulate words over her, and still held her, panting, to his beating heart. Even when the first rush of love subsided a little he could not be so reasonable as he used to be. He was wild against his own father, hers, and every obstacle, and implored her to marry him at once by special license, and leave the old people to settle the knot if they could.

Then Mary was astonished and hurt. "A clandestine marriage, Mr. Clifford!" said she. "I thought you had more respect for me than to mention such a thing."

Then he had to beg her pardon, and say she had forgiven him.

Then he took advantage of her emergency, and proceeded calmly to show her that it was their only chance.

Then Mary forgot how severely she had checked him, and merely said that was the last thing she would consent to, and bound him on his honor never to mention to Julia Clifford that he had proposed such a thing. Walter promised that readily enough, but stuck to his point; and as Mary's pride was wounded, and she was a girl of great spirit though love-sick, she froze to him, and soon after said she was very sorry, but she must not stay too long, or papa would be angry. She then begged him not to come out of the parlor, or the servant would see him.

"That is a trifle," said Walter. "I am going to obey in greater things than that. Ah! Mary, Mary, you don't love me as I love you."

"No, Walter," said Mary. "I do not love you as you love me, for I respect you. Then her lip trembled, and her eyes filled with tears."

Walter felt on his knees, and kissed her skirt several times; then ended with her hand. "Oh, don't harbor such a thought as that!" said he.

She sobbed, but made no reply.

They parted good friends, but chilled. That made them both unhappy to think of.

It was only two, or at the most three, days after this that, as Mary was walking in the garden, a nosegay fell at her feet. She picked it up, and immediately found a note half secreted in it. The next moment it was entirely secreted in her bosom. She sauntered indoors, and scolded up-stairs to her room to read it.

The writer told her in a few agitated words that their fathers had met, and she must speak to her directly. Would she meet him for a moment at the garden gate at nine o'clock that evening?

"No, no, no!" cried Mary, as if she was there. She was frightened. Suppose they should be caught. The shame—the disgrace. But oh, the temptation! Well, then, how wrong of him to tempt her! She must not go. There was no time to write and refuse; but she must not go. She would not go. And in this resolution she persisted. Nine o'clock struck, and she never moved. Then she began to picture Walter's face of disappointment and his unhappiness. At ten minutes past nine she tied a handkerchief round her head and went.

There he was at the gate, pale and agitated. He did not give her time to speak.

"Pray forgive me," he said; "but I saw no other way. It is all over, Mary, unless you love me as I love you."

"Don't begin by doubting me," she said. "Tell me, dear."

"It is soon told. Our fathers have met at that wretched pit, and the foreman has told me what passed between them. My father complained that mining for coal was not husbandry, and it was very unfair to do it, and to smoke him out of house and home. (Unfortunately the wind was west, and blew the smoke of the steam-engine over his lawn.) Your father said he took the farm, and that, express stipulation. Colonel Clifford said, 'No; the condition was smuggled in.' Then smuggle it out," said Mr. Bartley.

"Oh!"

"If it had only ended there, Mary. But they were both in a passion, and must empty their hearts. Colonel Clifford said he had every respect for you, but had other views for his son. Mr. Bartley said he was thankful to hear it, for he looked higher for his daughter. 'Higher in trade, I suppose,' said my father; 'the Lord Mayor's nephew.' 'Well,' said Mr. Bartley, 'I would rather marry her to money than to mortgages.' And the end of it was they parted enemies for life."

"No, no; not for life!"

"For life, Mary. It is an old grudge revived. Indeed, the first quarrel was only skinned over. Don't deceive yourself. We have nothing to do but disobey them or part."

"And you can say that, Walter? Oh, have a little patience!"

"So I would," said Walter, "if there was any hope. But there is none. There is nothing to wait for but the death of our parents, and by that time I shall be an elderly man, and you will have lost your bloom and wasted your youth—for what? No; I feel sometimes this will drive me mad, or make me a villain. I am beginning to hate my own father, and everybody else that thwarts my love. How can they earn my hate more surely? No, Mary; I see the future as plainly as I see your dear face, so pale and shocked. I can't help it. If you will marry me, and so make sure, I will keep it secret as long as you like; I shall have got you, whatever they may say or do; but if you won't, I'll leave the country at once, and get peace if I can't get love."

"Leave the country?" said Mary, faintly. "What good would that do?"

"I don't know. Perhaps bring my father to his senses for one thing; and—why knows?—perhaps you will listen to reason when you see I can't wait for the consent of two egoists—for that is

what they both are—that have no real love or pity for you or me."

"Ah," said Mary, with a deep sigh, "I see even men have their faults, and I admired them so. They are impatient, selfish."

"Yes, if it is selfish to defend one's self against brutal selfishness. I am selfish; and that is better than to be a slave to egoists, and lie down to be trodden on as you would do. Come, Mary, for pity's sake, decide which you love best—your father; who does not care much for you, or me, who adore you, and will give you a life of gratitude as well as love, if you will only see things as they are and always will be, and trust yourself to me as my dear, dear, blessed, adored wife!"

"I love you best," said Mary, "and I hope it is not wicked. But I love him too, though he does say 'wait.' And I respect myself, and I dare not defy my parent, and I will not marry secretly; that is degrading. And, oh, Walter, think how young I am and inexperienced, and you that are so much older, and I hoped would be my guide and make me better; is it you who tempt me to clandestine meetings that I blush for, and a clandestine marriage for which I should despise myself?"

Walter turned suddenly calm, for these words pricked his conscience.

"You are right," said he. "I am a blackguard, and you are an angel of purity and goodness. Forgive me, I will never tempt or torment you again. For pity's sake forgive me. You don't know what men's passions are. Forgive me!"

"With all my heart, dear," said Mary, crying gently.

He put both arms suddenly round her neck and kissed her wet eyes with a sigh of despair. Then he seemed to tear himself away by a great effort, and she leaned limp and powerless on the gate, and heard his footsteps die away into the night. They struck chill upon her foreboding heart, for she felt that they were parted.

[To be Continued.]

"TOM POORHOUSE."

[Detroit Free Press.]

The old clock downstairs began to strike midnight as he started up. The wind was making the old farmhouse rock and tremble, and the powder-like snow was driving in through every crevice. The wife slept undisturbed, but the old farmer was nervous and wakeful.

"Farmer John, are you awake?"

It was a voice which he had never heard before. It sounded close at his bedside, and yet, as he looked about the room, fairly lit by the cold winter moon shining in through the window, he saw nothing but familiar objects.

"I am your accuser!" continued the voice—"I am a witness against you!"

"What have I done?" gasped Farmer John.

"Last fall you took a lad from the poorhouse—had one bound to you according to law."

"Sartin—sartin, and it was a poor speculation for me. The boy hasn't aimed his salt."

"You broke him down in the harvest field, and when you knew that he was ill you refused him medicine! The boy hasn't seen a real day for three months."

"Yes, but boys are great shirkers. How'd I know whether he was sick or playing off on me?"

"You are lying to your conscience, Farmer John! How has that boy fared for provisions and clothes?"

"Hain't he got some of my old clothes on this very minute?" protested the farmer.

"They is full o' holes and patches, in course, but am I going to take a boy out of the poorhouse and dress him in broad cloth? Sposen he does shiver like a silverer! Don't hurt anybody! He gets 'nuff to eat, I reckon—leastwise he ain't a-sleepin' to feel nobly on sweet cake."

"Think of his sleeping in that cold and dismal garret such a night as this!" wailed the accuser.

"All his own fault!" replied the farmer, "gin him a chamber by himself, but he kept coughing and groaning till I couldn't sleep. Put it all on to git sympathy, but he made a mistake. Mo'n the old woman worked for what we've got, and others must do the same."

"A straw bed—a ragged quilt, and the night cold enough to chill an ox!" accused the voice.

"Oul phaw!" You can't make me believe the boys of to-day are so much more tender on the boys of my time. It hain't healthy for boys to sleep too warm. He'll warm up at the wood-pile as soon as daylight comes."

"Farmer John, no true Christian can talk as you do. You have neither mercy nor charity!"

"Pooh! Got lots of it! And if I wasn't a christian man how'd I git to be a deacon in the church? That boy is a heap better off 'n most of 'em."

"His body is black and blue from the poundings you have inflicted."

"Well, he shouldn't oversleep, then."

"You have a heart of stone, Farmer John. If that boy dies you will be accused at the judgment seat of his murder!"

"Nonsense! Nobody feels any more pity for poor folks than I do, and if Tom Poorhouse dies it will be of eating too much."

"This is the oldest patient we have in the asylum," said the guide, as we halted at the lower end of the ward.

It was a grated door. I looked through and saw an old man cowering in a corner. After a moment he rose up and approached the door and whispered:

"And at daylight I called and called him, but he didn't get up. I went up with the horse whip to teach him better'n to oversleep on me that way, but Tom Poorhouse was dead on his straw bed, and the snow had blown in till it almost kivered him up